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AUTHOR Myers, Scott A.
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ABSTRACT

One way to implement theory into existing public relations classes is to utilize the Process of Public Relations model developed by L. W. Long and V. Hazleton. The use of the model in the classroom is important because the model stresses the interdependence between the public relations practitioner and the organization. The model begins by defining the parameters of five environmental dimensions that impact the client-practitioner relationship: political, social, economic, technological, and competitive. Next, the four elements of input (organizational goals, organizational structure, organizational resources, and management philosophy) are channeled into the public relations decision process, allowing the public relations crisis to be defined, researched, and analyzed, while a solution is sought. After this process is completed, the change agent (practitioner) attempts to get the organization to adopt the resolution by considering the public relations goals, the solution characteristics, the public relations audience analysis, the strategy, and the overall program objectives. Finally, the process shifts to message transmission embracing three theories: rhetorical, two-step flow, and diffusion. (Twenty-eight references are attached.) (KEH)

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A Theoretical Approach to the Long-Hazleton Process of Public Relations Model

Scott A. Myers

Buena Vista College

Storm Lake, Iowa 50588

(712) 732-4471

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Abstract

In the past, the public relations field has been plagued with demands for a strong theoretical base from which to operate. This paper examines how theory can be applied to the Long-Hazleton Process of Public Relations Model currently in use in the university classroom, thus implementing theory into existing teaching plans.

A Theoretical Approach to the Long-Hazleton

Process of Public Relations Model

In the past, the public relations field has been plagued with demands for a strong theoretical base from which to operate. Although public relations does not "own" specific theories that are exclusive to its discipline, there are many theories within the realm of speech communication that are salient to the public relations domain. It is not always necessary for a discipline to embrace an exclusive set of theories in order to qualify its existence grounded in research and application.

The study of public relations is intriguing; however, the stress is too often placed upon the application of practical skills and the student's ability to emerge from the classroom with a working knowledge of the public relations process. The teaching of hands-on, practical application of skills is not enough as communication theory should be viewed as a valuable addition to cultivating and exploring the concepts of public relations. Theory should be present as a supplement, but is it? A recent perusal of eight public relations textbooks (Moore & Kalupa, Public Relations Principles, Cases, and Problems, 1985; Seitel, The Practice of Public Relations, 1987; Baskin & Aronoff, Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice, 1988; Wilcox, Ault, & Agee, Public Relations Strategies and Tactics, 1989; Reilly, Public Relations in Action, 1987; Simon, Public Relations: Concepts and Practices, 1984; Haberman & Dolphin, Public Relations The Necessary Art, 1988; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, Effective

Public Relations, 1985) found that only three chapters (among all eight books) were devoted to theory and its importance in public relations. This lack of theory-based chapters in the textbooks affirms a belief that "current public relations programs . . . neglect necessary instruction in social science theory and techniques . . ." (Gibson, 1987, p. 25), although public relations educators have expressed a strong need to emphasize social science theory in the classroom (Gibson, 1987).

Yet, theory becomes "a legitimate concern of public relations practitioners because practitioners can contribute to theory development" and these developed theories conversely "contribute to the work of practitioners" (Botan, 1989, p. 102). As the number of people entering the public relations profession increases, the content level of education must continue to grow in regard to quality and rigor. According to Grunig (1988), the number of students choosing public relation as a major is increasing as well.

One way to implement theory into existing public relations classes is to utilize the Process of Public Relations model developed by Long and Hazleton (1985). In this paper, the Long-Hazleton model will be briefly explained, and the application of theory to the model will be integrated into each section. The purpose of this paper is to illustrate how a theory can be used to greater define the Process of Public Relations model, and how theory helps exemplify the public relations process.

The use of the Long-Hazleton model in the classroom is important and practical for a primary reason: the model stresses the interdependence between the public relations practitioner and the organization. According to the 1981 PRSA Task Force,

the role of the public relations practitioner is to achieve " 'adaptation between the organization and its publics for their (the publics) mutual benefit' " (Gollner, 1984, p. 7). The Long-Hazleton model permits the adaptations that develop mutually beneficial practitioner-client relationships.

As an entity, the Process of Public Relations model can be viewed simply as an example of social-exchange theory. It is important to consider that social structures emerge as a result of social exchanges between people (Prior-Miller, 1989). Social-exchange theory assumes that individuals tend to manifest rewarding behaviors, that each interaction is assigned an arbitrary value, and that the benefits of the interaction are directly related to the benefits received during the exchange (Emerson in Prior-Miller, 1989). Through self-guided interaction, individuals form and sustain a relationship when the belief is present that the rewards will outweigh the costs. In terms of public relations, clients seek the aid of practitioners when there is a need to either maintain, produce a change, or alter a change within the organization's environments. Working with an organization's various publics to change any existing conditions hopefully yields optimal results for both the client and the practitioner, thereby making the costs associated with this relationship certainly less than the rewards. The practice of the client-practitioner relationship is based upon the manifestation of rewarding behaviors among individuals, the value of interactions being arbitrarily assigned, and the benefits of each subsequent interaction being related to any benefits received during the exchange. The mutual interchange between a client and a practitioner is the underlying premise of social-exchange theory.

The model begins with defining the parameters of five environmental dimensions that impact the client-practitioner relationship: political, social, economic, technological, and competitive. The identity of key components of each dimension is vital. Essential to any practitioner is the basic comprehension of how each environment operates. Indeed, Acharya (1985; in Pavlik, 1987) believes that the role of public relations will vary depending upon the environmental forces that surround the public relations process. Consequently, structural-functionalism is best applicable to the Environmental Dimensions.

Structural-functionalism theory states that social phenomena exist due to the interdependence between existing social structures, and the functions of the structures. Regardless of the environment, the practitioner must have cognizance of the relationship between the structure of the environment, and the functions that the environment serve. In order to become familar with the environment, the parts that comprise the environment must be studied. Within the environment the practitioner's needs become a second priority; thus, the nature of the environment is characterized not by the practitioner's personal goals or values, but rather by the purpose or reason for being present in the environment. The social interactions are determined by the environment in which the practitioner serves. Dozier (1984) states that the practitioner plays one of two roles: either the communication manager role--a person who is regarded as the environment's foremost expert at solving public relations problems--or the technician role--a person who provides the necessary support for solving the public relations problem, but is not always instrumental in doing so. In either role, the

actions of the practitioner are dictated by the structure and functions of the environment. Structural-functionalism theory defines the notion for each practitioner's existence.

From the Environmental Dimension stem four elements that constitute the Inputs of the public relations process: organizational goals, organizational structure, organizational resources, and management philosophy. Because each campaign is unique, and because each organization is different, these four elements will vary. Thus, symbolic interactionism theory reasonably interprets the Inputs.

The premise behind symbolic interactionism is that social reality is what people construct it to be, with little regard as to whether the reality is accurate or not (Prior-Miller, 1989). Organizations use symbols in their everyday interactions, and the meaning of the symbols is determined by the specific organization and its use of the particular symbolism between all members. An organization's goals, structure, resources, and management philosophy may be determined by management, but the social reality that organizational members derive from these elements are developed and interpreted through communication. Through both individual and collective efforts, organizations become "what people believe them to be" (Prior-Miller, 1989, p. 70). An organization's social reality is created through symbols, and the use of symbols will be determined by the organization for the practitioner's use. Symbols are not universal for all organizations and problems, and practitioners must be aware of this.

The Inputs are then channeled into the Public Relations Decision Process. The Decision Process allows the public relations crisis to be defined, researched, and

analyzed while at the same time a solution is being readily sought. However, the Decision Process must be carefully investigated due to a public's ability to develop multiple perceptions of the situation. Two theories help explain the Decision Process. Laing's (1967) perception theory hypothesizes about the way an individual may arrive at a conclusion. Laing states that a relationship between a problem and a solution is uniquely defined by each individual. This definition is influenced by the individual's relationships and his perceptions of these relationships. A person can either experience a relationship directly through interaction (a direct perspective) or through inferences about the other person in the relationship (a metaperspective) (Littlejohn, 1983). It can be difficult, then, to assess a problem and its solution becaues the public may be composed of individuals who visualize the problem-solution through the metaperspective rather than a direct perspective. For example, when AIDS patient Paul Curran of the New England Telephone Company resumed work after winning a discrimination suit brought against the NETC corporation, some employess refused to work with him (Davids, 1987) because of the metaperspectives held by the employees. In this case, only after the public relations department hosted a seminar on AIDS that addressed the employees' concerns did the situation stabilize, thus eliminating the previously-held metaperspectives and creating a new one.

Attribution theory, on the other hand, deals with the ways in which people infer the causes of behavior. The inferences are made based upon the psychological make-up of each individual. A person attempts to determine the cause of another individual's behavior, and tries to assign cause systematically based on their own

interpretation of the behavior and their feelings toward the other person. This assignation of behavior, then, directs all subsequent behavior (Littlejohn, 1983). The communicator's attributions, hence attribution theory, determine meaning of the interaction. In order to arrive at any viable conclusions, the practitioner must realize that the perceptions of the problem will vary depending upon an individual's recognition of the problem. Perception theory and attribution theory are just two theories that enhance the understanding of the Decision Process.

According to Prior-Miller (1989), organizations can also be viewed as the products of conflict among individuals. At any point, conflict resolution becomes necessary. After the Decision Process has been completed, any arisen conflict must be resolved. But how does the change agent (the practitioner) get the organization to adopt the resolution? (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977). The change agent must take the Public Relations Program into consideration. The Public Relations Program consists of five parts: the public relations goals, the solution characteristics, the public relations audience analysis, the strategy, and the overall program objectives. Since there will always be differences in power and arguments over resources, the Public Relations Program should respond favorably to the earlier enacted Decision Process. One way to approach this Program is with a thorough audience analysis. Not knowing the audience may result in a process of continual conflict (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977).

To analyze an audience effectively, three areas must be explored: the demographics, the psychographics, and the emotive level of audience members. In order to study an audience accurately, the practitioner should employ the Composite

Audience Profile as developed by Scott III and O'Hair (1989). While the Composite Audience Profile (CAP) is not labeled as a theory, the CAP does conceptualize an observable set of events (Littlejohn, 1983).

This three-way examination process explores the audience most thoroughly. Demographics are the basic staple of any analysis due to being observable traits that any practitioner can record (e.g. age, gender). Psychographics is the classification of individuals into categories of psychological make-up (e.g. personality, attitude) that can be labeled as a "self-described self-concept" (Scott III & O'Hair, 1989, p. 206). The emotive level of an audience is another consideration since each individual can react differently to similar stimuli, therefore creating emotions which guide decision-making without awareness. The use of the CAP grants a more intensive analysis of an audience before any message transmission. The combination of these three properties helps to "exact a comprehensive audience analysis" that will "help identify opinion leaders who can become assets in the public relations campaign" (Scott III & O'Hair, 1989, p. 205).

Once the practitioner is aware of the Public Relations Program, then the practitioner must concentrate on the Communication Process. The Communication Process consists of two stages: Encoding, which is the process of sending a meesage to a receiver; and Implementation/Delivery, which is the message transmission. The Communication Process embraces three theories--rhetorical theory, the two-step flow theory, and diffusion theory. Each theory advances the reasoning behind the Communication Process.

Rhetoric can be defined as any type of discourse that attempts to persuade, evaluate, or inform an audience (Ehninger, 1968). Rhetoric that emphasize collective symbol usage is placed into the Encoding stage. The Encoding Process, coupled with the specifically formulated Public Relations Program, lets the practitioner persuade, evaluate, or inform using discourse aimed at a target public. Although there are many communication theories that are deemed as being rhetorical in nature, Bormann's (1973) fantasy theme analysis is perhaps one of the more pervasive theories. A fantasy theme begins with the script of an individual; scripts combine between a group of individuals to collectively create fantasy, in which a slightly idiosyncratic and unique discourse has evolved. The fantasy theme creation permits participant interaction based on symbols present in the theme(s), and permits the exhibition of appropriate behavior. Through the Encoding of a fantasy theme, the practitioner then designs all discourse to reflect the use of the intended symbolism. It is essential that the content of the fantasy theme be congruent between the client's use and the practitioner's understanding. Fantasy theme analysis is just one avenue of the Communication Process.

According to Grunig (1988), the public relations field operates within the arena of persuasion, which explains the relevance of the use of opinion leaders. The two-step flow theory (Terry, in Wakefield and Krider, 1987) states that information affects opinion leaders first, who in turn, influence their peers. These opinion leaders can be a source of influence in any public relations campaign. In public relations, an opinion leader's presence influencing the thoughts and ideas of their peers remains a common

practice among groups. Diffusion theory, conversely, assumes that communication occurs through five stages: awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1985, p. 271). When putting diffusion theory into practice, the public relations professional develops the initial message and has the ability to trace the message. These two theories work together; as the two-step flow theory goes into effect, due to the use of opinion leaders, the message is diffused through the available channels. Nevertheless, the Communication Process will lose its effectiveness without the properly defined message stimuli.

The message should stimulate the audience through three means--physiological, psychological, and social. A physiological stimulus creates the interaction between the audience demographics and a perceived message. A psychological stimulus involves an audience member's attribution of the meaning and a message. A social stimulus (e.g. opinion leaders, significant others) can be instrumental by influencing the desired effects of the message onto others. Each produced message must have some effect upon the intended public. The content level of a message is not enough; the relational level of each message should awaken any degree of dissonance in each individual. This is where cognitive dissonance theory plays a role in Message Stimuli. Within the realm of this theory lies the notion that the larger the amount of dissonance, the greater the perceived need for change. However, the amount of dissonance one expereinces depends upon the change, its proposed solutions, and its alternatives (Festinger in Littlejohn, 1983). In public relations, change is often seen as a remedy for a situation. Message Stimuli must be

adapted to the attitudes, beliefs, and values of the target public because the dissonance will yield some degree of change, whether the change is beneficial or not. The three properties must be designed to create the desired level of dissonance.

After message construction, the consumption is left to the Public Relations Audience and the amount of dissonance will filter throughout the audience. The Public Relations Audience, when creating a response to the Message Stimuli, is composed of the individual and group states, and the influence states that constitute an audience's reaction. Although mentioned previously, symbolic-interactionism theory is applicable at this stage as well. Since symbolism is considered to be the substance of any organization (Tompkins, 1985), the social reality viewed by the audience is created by the audience either through individual or group processes. The impact of Influence States, as experienced by the audience, depends upon the emphasis and usage of symbols. Each audience member (and an audience as a whole) has a limited perceptual capacity; all perceptions are sorted and categorized based upon the interpretation of symbols. Each and every interaction reflects the usage of symbolism that is context-specific.

After the audience has received the message, the campaign results in either a maintenance of or a change in attitudes and/or behaviors. To examine any evidence of change, game theory can be employed. Game theory requires the presence of two players--in this case, the client and the practitioner. In order to arrive at an outcome, each player selects a strategy that achieves this outcome. The practitioner must call upon "instinct, gut, feelings, experience and seat-of-the-pants judgment" (Murphy,

1987, p. 11) to produce the end result of maintaining or changing any previously proclaimed attitudes and/or behaviors. Both parties win in the sense that the campaign is a success; the desired attitudinal and behavioral modifications for the client's publics stemmed from the practitioner's program, use of communication, and development of message. Yet, the game can also result in a lose-lose situation, in which the needs of the client and the goals of the practitioner are not mutually met, and a zero-sum situation, in which one player wins at the other player's expense. In these instances, it is possible that the attitudinal and/or behavioral modifications were not congruent with the developed public relations proposal. Both parties should utilize a win-win approach for mutually beneficial results. Game theory, when handled effectively via a win-win situation, reiterates the notion that the Process of Public Relations model follows the direction of social-exchange theory. Both participants (client and practitioner) enter into a relationship with the belief that the overall rewards will outweigh any costs, and the exchange is deemed satisfactory.

This paper examined how theory can be applied to the Process of Public Relations model currently in use, and offers one possible way of integrating theory into practice. This is just one proposal applying theory to the Long-Hazleton model. In no way are the theories proposed for induction into this model rigid. This model allows for flexibility in teaching theory, and can be accomplished in a variety of ways.

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THE PROCESS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS